

Black history:

Unions lead civil rights struggles

NEW BRUNSWICK — Solemn seas of marchers on the roads to Selma, Montgomery and Washington; grotesquely twisted faces of hecklers, spitting out hatred; bull-necked sheriffs and snarling police dogs; the sublime canidances of Martin Luther King.

These are among the most vivid memories of the civil rights explosion of the early 1960s.

However, few may recall another force that energized the racial drama from off stage: the thousands of Black men and women from the ranks of organized labor who engineered many of the great marches and rallies and provided potent political influence for the civil rights cause.

Indeed, Black labor's war on injustice predates the Civil War — yet has been largely overlooked by historians.

The new Afro-American labor Archive at Rutgers University has rescued the Black worker from unwarranted obscurity. Located in Alexander Library on the New Brunswick campus, the growing resource is the first comprehensive collection devoted solely to the history of Black labor in America.

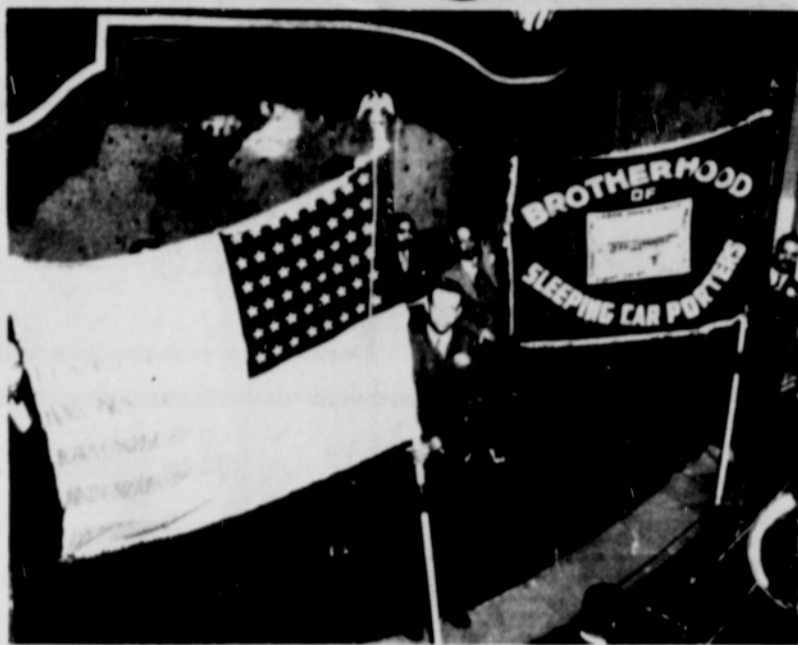
"Until now, there has been no real systematic archival approach to Afro-American labor history," according to Joseph Wilson, an assistant professor of Africana studies at Rutgers and the director of the project.

"Here, we have begun to locate, preserve and make accessible to scholars all material relating to Black workers in the U.S. after the Civil War," he explains. "There will be particular emphasis on labor and civil rights, Black-white labor relations, working conditions for Blacks, and the position of Black workers in the hierarchies of the various trade unions."

The State University of New Jersey collection includes the papers of prominent Black union leaders, as well as a host of photographs and documents from various unions and labor organizations. One of the most fascinating treasures of the archives is a series of 240 audio recordings of meetings held from 1940-55 by the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the famed pioneering Black union.

Dr. Wilson says that the Black labor movement has deep roots in American history. "A movement existed as far back as the age of slavery," he says. "There were at least 230 documented slave revolts, and countless sitdown strikes."

"After the Civil War, the Knights of labor attempted to organize Black workers in the North and South,



"Fight Or Be Slaves" — Members of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first successful Black labor union in the U.S., proudly display their banner at a 1955 ceremony celebrating the organization's 30th anniversary.

but these efforts eventually failed," Wilson points out. "It wasn't until the emergence of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters after World War I that another successful effort was made."

The success of the Porters, established in 1925, was in large measure due to its founder, A. Philip Randolph, some of whose papers are in the Rutgers collection.

"Randolph was a formidable, charismatic figure," says Wilson. "With much opposition from the Pullman Company, he traveled across the national organizing the porters. He was a lifelong Socialist, founder of the radical Black Newspaper, *The Messenger* — later the voice of the Porters — and generally championed the cause of oppressed people everywhere, regardless of nationality or race."

"At one point in the early 1920, the U.S. government labeled him 'the most dangerous man in America,'" Wilson said.

Later, in 1939, Randolph organized a march on Washington designed to protest job discrimination. Scheduled for 1940, the march was called off when President Franklin Roosevelt agreed to establish the Fair Employment Practices Commission, which eventually gave rise to today's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

"The Porters — and Black labor generally — were crucial to the civil rights movement," Wilson says. "The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was organized with the Porters' assistance; union leaders persuad-

then-presidential candidate, votes which were vital in that extremely tight electoral contest.

Other organizations represented in the collection include Fightback, which has battled for fair hiring in the construction industry; the Negro American Labor Council, organized by Randolph in the late 1950s, which pressured against discrimination in industrial plants; and its successor, the Coalition of Black trade Unionists, which Wilson calls the most visible force in Black labor today.

The private papers of many prominent Black labor leaders are, or are expected to be, part of the Rutgers archive — men such as Hosea Hudson, James Haughton, Ernest Thompson and Hilliard Ellis.

Ellis is a particularly flamboyant figure. Having seen his blacksmith father lynched by the Ku Klux Klan, he became a committed radical and rose to become president of a United Auto Workers local in Illinois. While fighting for his fellow workers, the fearless Ellis defied both racists in the AFL-CIO and hoodlums in Chicago's organized underworld. An ex-boxer, he always carried two .38 caliber revolvers under his jacket. He still serves as an unofficial UAW adviser, according to Wilson.

"Much more work has yet to be done, however," he cautions, "particularly in securing Black representation on the national council of the AFL-CIO. A great deal must also be done to improve the lot of Black working women. Women in general earn about 40 to 60 percent of what men earn for the same jobs. Black women are at the bottom of that scale."

ed Martin Luther King to become involved with the SCLC and with the Montgomery bus boycott of 1957, which really launched his civil rights career.

"Most people identify the civil rights movement solely with the church," Wilson adds. "But labor was the cornerstone. It was Randolph who chaired the famous 1963 march on Washington, and it was largely the labor rank and file who organized the march and raised the funds for it."

Wilson says that Black labor leaders influenced John F. Kennedy to make his celebrated telephone call in support of King in 1960 — and that the unions subsequently mobilized substantial Black backing for the



Steve Kosokoff, professor at P.S.U. and Margot Beutier, director of Oregon Human SERVE, confer with Attorney Kathleen Heron, member of the National Lawyers' Guild Committee working with POSAF on legal defense, after being cited for trespassing at the office of the honorary South African Consul during the ongoing demonstrations against U.S. involvement in South Africa. (Photo: Richard J. Brown)

Be prepared for tax time

Now is the time for Oregonians to begin gathering receipts and other records for their annual income tax returns, advises T. Blair Evans, District Director for the Internal Revenue Service in Oregon.

These records will help taxpayers, particularly those who itemize, complete accurate returns, Evans said. The records can also be used to back up various claims in case of examination and can serve as reminders of possible overlooked deductions.

When itemizing, taxpayers should bear in mind interest paid on loans

and mortgages, as well as payments for medical insurance recorded on various informational statements. Many statements are mailed to taxpayers that detail payments made for the year. These records should be retained since they document expenses that are often deductible and easily overlooked.

Medical expenses, union dues and charitable contributions are a few other commonly-claimed deductions for which auditors often request supporting evidence.

King wing dedicated to Ford

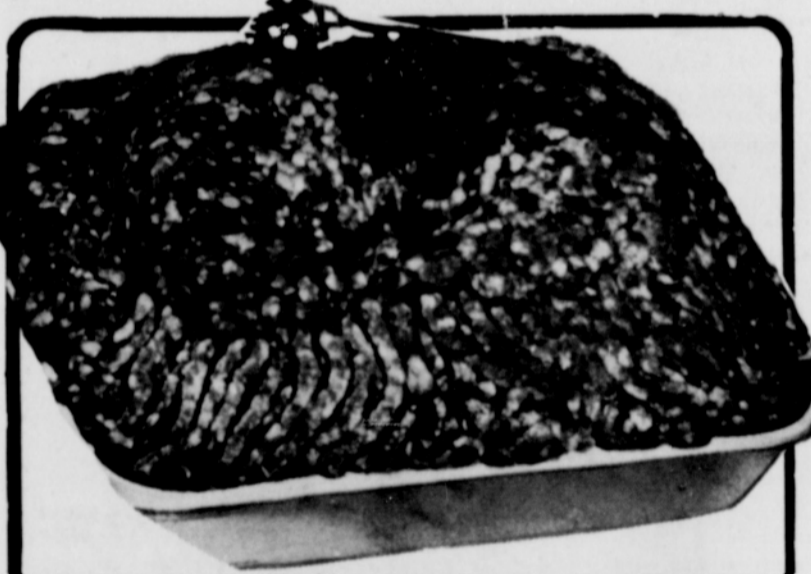
A wing at the Martin Luther King Facility Building, 4906 N.E. Sixth Ave., Portland, will be dedicated to Mr. Robert G. Ford, Oregon's first Black elementary and secondary teacher, in a ceremony to be held at the facility at 8 p.m., on January 10.

Mr. Ford is being honored for distinguished service in the Portland Public School system at Old Eliot and Holladay elementary schools, and Roosevelt High School, from 1945 until his retirement in 1972.

Mr. Ford was selected Teacher of the Year 1970-71.

The presentation is being made by former students, as a thank you for his inspiration and for the basic education he gave them, as well as a sense of pride.

A plaque will be permanently placed at the facility.



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